

The Way of Walāya

Friendship *with* Allāh

(وَيْحَالِ اللَّهِ)



Souad Hakim

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Prologue

Glory be to Allāh who created all creatures equal in relation to Him. Everybody is His servant and carries His Divine secret, the secret of creation and manifestation. And every creature enjoys a particular aspect and a special relationship with Allāh the Real (*al-Haqq*) that no one else shares and without a third coming between. The source and evidence of this special aspect coincide with the moment of creation, the moment when the will of the Real decided to create this creature, and so he becomes.

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (رحمته الله) makes us understand the possibility of establishing this particular creature-creator relationship by using geometric symbolism. He chooses the design of the circle and elaborates on the relationship between its centre and every point on the circumference. In a circle each radiation emitted from the centre is connected to a corresponding point on the circumference. Thus, in our sensible world there is the possibility of the One in essence coinciding with many different numbers without the One becoming multiple or the relations becoming confused.

Among all these creatures, analogous to the grains of sand spread like oceans without shores or harbours, a distinguished few appear in the circle of vision. The Great Shaykh does not restrict this appearance to the human species since the Real creates what He wants, then selects from within each species.

Allāh, Glory to Him, selected the word '*Allāh*' from among the Beautiful Names, and from among people,

the messengers; from men, Muhammad (ﷺ); from women, Mary and Asyah; from the servants, the angels; from the angels, the Spirit (Gabriel); from elements, water; from months, Ramadan; from methods of worship, fasting; from centuries, the century of the Prophet (ﷺ); from weekdays, Friday; from nights, the Night of *Qadr*; from actions, the religious duties; from Qur'anic suras, the sura of *Yâ Sîn*; from the Qur'anic verses, the *°Āyat al-Kursî*; from colours, white; from the human being, the heart; from proofs, the proofs of existence; from lights, the lights accompanied by vision; from among desires, intentionality, since it discriminates in accepting an action or rejecting it; and so on. Therefore, despite the original equality of things, everything in itself allows for selection. This Divine selection plays a major role since the Sufis, due to their knowledge of this selection, divided their works according to time and place and consequently selected their invocation and their way and its steps.

The topic of this paper, the way of *walâya*, is an attempt to approach certain people selected by Allāh (ﷻ) from among millions of others to be His friends, His '*walîs*', hoping that this proximity will benefit us in a way that can be adopted easily, or even with difficulty. So we follow, or at least we try. If one manages to eliminate the obstacles of separation, one will be united and cross from the shadows, illusions and assumptions to substance, action and influence. One crosses from being for oneself, with one's limited abilities, to being for Allāh (ﷻ) with an opening to unlimited and unexpected abilities that arise as a result of this new state.

Ibn 'Arabi's writings are saturated with gifts received by the heir, especially the ascensions and addresses outlined in his *Futûhât* and *Kitâb al-Isrâ'*.

So will this study be able to offer anything deeper than some of the current approaches?

Foundations

Before clarifying the different types of *walîs* and the means of their arrival, let us consider three points which need to be agreed upon from the beginning:

1. *Knowledge and Work*

It may be noticed, through studying Sufi experiences, that Sufism can be classified according to two aspects. The first is represented by outstanding luminaries like Abu Talib al-Makki, al-Qushairi, al-Tusi, Suhrawardi and finally, in its perfection, by Ghazali. It is a safe course based on conduct, and considers the Sufi experience to be an exercise for the fulfilment of a ladder of ranks that are already known and determined. This course selects from all knowledge the knowledge of conduct. Indeed, the purpose of knowledge is work as we observe with Ghazali, who divided Sufi knowledge into the knowledge of conduct and the knowledge of unveiling, and based his book *Ihyâ' Ulûm al-Dîn* on the knowledge of conduct, leaving out that of unveiling because the latter is a specific bestowal and includes no work.

The second aspect is represented by individuals like Abu Yazid al-Bistami, Shibli, Junayd, Hallaj and finally, in its perfection, by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. It is a course that involves risk, based on spiritual states and witnessing of the heart. It views the Sufi experience as being the return of the human being to

defined ways that gather together this unlimited multiplicity of ways?

The second challenge is that a lot of research and many books are concerned with the study of the Sufi way as being the one that leads to *walâya*. There is almost a consensus on the effectiveness of physical effort and psychological exertion on the human's part in return for the Divine gift to the human. *Walâya*, according to the Sufis even before Ibn 'Arabi, is a Divine gift to the human being, without neglecting the roles of work and exercise in preparation and education.

The *Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, together with other books by Ibn 'Arabi, includes directions that push the follower of the way towards effort and exertion and to the way based on the four external principles: hunger, wakefulness, silence and solitude; and on the five internal principles: veracity, trust, patience, resolution and certainty. All nine are included in the Sufi way. In addition, I have personally conducted studies that revealed to me the ways to arrive at the Holy Presence outlined by Ibn 'Arabi in his books. The most important are:

1. The way of invocation, explained in the study '*Invocation and Illumination*'.
2. The way of 'correspondence of attributes' based on changing the states of the self and its attributes, starting from conduct (*sulûk*).
3. The way of following the Prophet (ﷺ) and imitating his states, his sayings and his works, which leads to an opening into his world and his inheritance.

linked Sufis with the *walîs*, specifically the 'men of ranks'?

In the second passage, Ibn 'Arabi instructs the seeking servants on how to relate the degree of their opening to the degree of their state. He teaches them the appropriate relationship between the opening and the state. He tells them to beware if the opening is found to be equal to the state because the world is not a place of recompense, but if the opening gives refinement and elevation then it is through the Divine care for His servant and is not deception.

These two positions make it clear that Ibn 'Arabi respects the law of causality in the action of the actors since for every action there is a result. At the same time he has not restricted the Divine bestowal to a law that governs it, which is the law of justice and recompense, but has opened an unlimited door suitable to the Divine side and cleared a place for graciousness and gifts originating from Allāh for those whom He selects from amongst his servants.

3. Will and Spiritual Aspiration (himma)

One may say that every system of thought takes a part of the human being as the essence and the key to understanding the whole. In the same way the Sufis considered that the essence of the human being is the will (*irâda*).

The human being wills and his value is the strength of this will. The strength of this will results from its sincerity and the purity of its facing, its collectedness, and its focusing on a specific matter. Many passages give an account of the ascension of the hearts to Allāh and what obstructs their way in the form of pressure

his original truth, to non-existence and extinction or pure susceptibility and a place for receiving Divine revelations. This course does not view the Sufi way as comprising pre-designed stations but instead sees the Sufi as the one who throws himself into the sea of non-existence, hoping to come out with existence on the second shore, where real existence and certain knowledge are found. This certainty is based on vision and witnessing and not on intellectual thought and speculation.

2. *The Law of Causality*

Ibn 'Arabi divides the Divine bestowal into two major parts: reward and gift. The reward follows positive work whereas the gift is a pure Divine giving without any known reason. Although there are only a few texts by Ibn 'Arabi about this, they reveal a great deal. We will consider two passages in particular: the first informs us that the actor, through physical effort and self-exertion, will inevitably receive from these actions an unveiling, which he calls the unveiling due to exertion. Once the souls are purified from the sadness of preoccupation with habit and are elevated above their physical condition, they become associated with their appropriate world, learn what the high spirits know from the knowledge of the Divine Kingdom and its secrets, and the meanings of the world are inscribed upon them.

Do these words of Ibn 'Arabi lead us to the distinction between the Sufi and the one in the way of the Sufi on the one hand and the *walîs* on the other, since the unveiling here is a result of purity, rather than being brought near and *walâya*? Or shall we stay with what the Great Shaykh mentioned in the *Futûhât* where he

acteristics of these types. We shall conclude by examining the results of this two-part study.

In the following sections we have relied on analytical readings of the second section of the *Futûhât*.

The *Walâya* is two *Walâyas*

Having been, since childhood, a member of a circle that studies Sufism and the Sufi experience as part of a thorough study of Islam, I managed through this association to become exposed to several unpublished statements by the founder of the circle, the great *walî*, Muhammad al-Dandarawi. The words of the *walîs* usually serve to explain each other, and I found references that assisted me in understanding the writings of the Great Shaykh concerning the *walâya*. Al-Sultan al-Dandarawi divides the *walâya* into two: the *walâya* of a *walî* of whom Allāh (ﷻ) takes charge (*tawalî*) and the *walâya* of a *walî* who is put in charge by Allāh (*tawliya*).

Based on this dual division of the *walâya*, I went back to the writings of the Shaykh, who considers the *walâya* to be the surrounding orbit (of all attainment). Through contemplation of the words of the text, I discovered that Ibn 'Arabi uses the expressions '*tawalî*' and '*tawliya*', which suggest a distinction between the two types of *walâya*: *walâya* of the *tawalî* and *walâya* of the *tawliya*. For example, he says about the *walâya* of *tawalî*: 'From amongst them are the righteous ones whom Allāh (ﷻ) takes charge of through the attribute of righteousness, and amongst them are the witnesses whom Allāh (ﷻ) takes charge of through witnessing, and amongst them are the

on the will to deviate from what it seeks, by tempting it, thwarting it and pulling it back from its goal. The one who arrives is tried again and again in order to test the sincerity of his will and the strength of its facing towards Allāh and not towards any kind of bestowal. Veracity of facing brings about the reunion.

The Sufis highlighted the term '*himma*', meaning spiritual aspiration. *Himma* is an active force of the Greatest Name of Allāh (Man). Ibn 'Arabi emphasized that the *himma* is a pure force in the human being and is found in the origin of his creation and nature, or else it is acquired later. From the point of view of it being a force, it is capable of attachment and is therefore attached in accordance with the will of its owner. If one attaches one's *himma* to the world, one achieves riches and position; if one attaches it to worship, one achieves stations and inspirations; and if it belongs to Allāh (ﷻ), all attachments fall away and the aspiration becomes one. This is the action of the *himma* in the arena of its attachment, which shows the importance of relating the *himma* to the will on the one hand and the will being sincere in its facing to Allāh (ﷻ) on the other. He who has no spiritual aspiration or sincere will in seeking Allāh (ﷻ) in gratitude or in love cannot have an ambition to follow the path of Sufi *walāya*.

Conclusions of the Preface

Now that the general framework of our subject has been identified through this introduction we shall divide the rest of the paper into two parts: the first will examine the different types of *walāya* according to Ibn 'Arabi; the second will clarify the char-

first is the way of conduct and the second, higher one, is the way of witnessing.

1. The Way of Conduct, Human Action

In this path the role of human endeavour in gaining the stations of Proximity is evident. Ibn 'Arabi does not delineate a path with prescribed steps where each step leads to another, as we find, for example, in the *Risâlat al-Qushairiyya* where the seeker begins with the station of repentance then proceeds from it to patience and contentment. Rather, for him every station is an independent world that the seeker enters as a result of undertaking a specific action. This station may be the first or the last in relation to the seeker. He enters it and reaches through it to the station of his *walâya*.

Ibn 'Arabi deduced the stations of his path not from the experience of earlier Sufis but from his study of prescription (*taklîf*). of Allāh (ﷻ) Divine prescription is divided between command and prohibition. It is for this that every command which issues from the Divine side to creation benefits the one addressed, as when the command is fulfilled the station is gained.

Ibn 'Arabi says 'Everything commanded is a station to be gained.' We can take an example from the *Futûhât* where the Great Shaykh speaks of the station of devoutness. In His Qur'an Allāh (ﷻ) has commanded His servants to be devout. Therefore devoutness becomes a station for the servant, but the rule of devoutness in the human being is divided into two because the Divine command for devoutness is divided into two. One part of the command is to revere Allāh as He deserves and the other part is to

virtuous ones whom Allāh (ﷻ) takes charge of through virtuousness, and amongst them are the people of submission whom Allāh takes charge of through submission. . .', and similarly with the obedient ones, the truthful ones, the patient ones, and the humble ones, each according to the attribute proper to him or her. Ibn 'Arabi says about the *walâya* of *tawliya*, 'He entrusts them [that is, Allāh (ﷻ) entrusts humankind] with the rank of command and prohibition.' Or he says: 'And these two attributes [forgiving, compassionate - *ghafûr*, *rahîm*] are only in the hands of the one with rule, command and prohibition. This supports the fact that He, the Most High, desired the succession of sovereignty and dominion in His words, praise be to Him: 'He made you vicegerents on earth.' This is the Divine *tawliya*. Its greatest effect is action through the *himma*.'

This makes it clear that Ibn 'Arabi also viewed the *walâya* as of two kinds: the *walâya* where Allāh (ﷻ) takes charge of the servant whom He provides with an attribute in which He stations the servant, and the *walâya* of *tawliya* where Allāh (ﷻ) makes the servant His vicegerent and prescribes the way for him after He has given into his hand rule, command and prohibition. In Chapter 73 of the *Futûhât*, where he discusses 'the men of Allāh', that is, the *walîs*, we can easily discern the two aspects of the *walâya*.

The Way is two

Careful reading of the second volume of the *Futûhât* allows us to deduce that Ibn 'Arabi establishes two ways for the *walâya*, one higher than the other. The

'I have' or 'my possessions' (*lî*, '*indî*, *matâ'î*). The verb 'drop' requires specific actors - the Sufis - and he does not speak of an example where it is Allāh, praise be to Him, who purified the Sufis from the need to add anything to themselves.

When he describes the servants of Allāh in general, all the verbs he uses emphasize that man is the subject. He relates about his uncle Abu Muslim-Khawlani, who is one of the servants, that he stays up at night and when tiredness overtakes him he hits his legs with rods and says to them: 'You deserve beating more than my mount. Do the companions of Muhammad (ﷺ) think that they can have him all to themselves? By Allāh (ﷻ), I will compete with them.' This story emphasizes the role of human action and the spiritual aspiration of the human will, the role of exertion in action in the context of outdoing and competition for a station.

If we return to the passages that speak of the men of ranks, the friends of Allāh (ﷻ) of whom Allāh (ﷻ) has taken charge, we will find that they are full of human action. However, this action is only the beginning of the way; it is as if the human being, when he practises a particular action continuously, is carried by an unceasing *himma*. This is not to say that this action becomes a character trait and a habit without effort or without prescription and without going beyond the known boundaries. However, the texts reveal that if the person continues at all times to carry out a specific action (such as repentance, patience or abstinence), Allāh (ﷻ) takes charge of him through the quality of that action in the interior. Good tidings follow for that servant who has

revere Him according to ability, and so on in every station. Therefore, one can enter the presence of Proximity through the endeavour to fulfil a Divine command.

Page after page in the *Futûhât* describes the numerous possibilities for man. The general rule is that every command results in a spiritual station. Ibn 'Arabi points out many of these stations, like repentance, spiritual exertion, intimacy, flight, devoutness, piety, abstinence, silence, wakefulness, fear, hope, grief, hunger, humility, self-denial, contentment, trust, gratitude, certainty, patience, servanthood, devotion, veracity, diffidence, freedom, remembrance, meditation, chivalry, poverty, decency, wisdom, companionship, *walâya*, unification, knowledge and love. From another aspect, Ibn 'Arabi does not restrict spiritual stations to what he describes but leaves the door open for the seeker so that he can enter through any order of authority in the Qur'an or the Hadith that can be obeyed. Wherever the seeker finds a command to act, he knows that an attainable spiritual station can be gained.

Having established that work is one of the ways to gain *walâya*, we return to the facets of *walâya* and find out which one is achieved through work, which one we reach through our human exertion. We can understand the different forms of action which Ibn 'Arabi employs in his description of the men of ranks, and we notice that the texts are full of actions whose subject is mankind, without reference to Allâh (ﷻ) who acts in the human being. He says of the Sufis, the men of ranks, that they have dropped the possessive adjective (*ya*) three times, so they do not say 'for me',

understanding and education, and proximity to the *walâya* of others. But here he allows us to enter the vast expanse of his personal *walâya*, the expanse of knowledge which is the nub of *walâya* and its resolution.

We will start by delineating this way from its first premisses, from the appearance of the Divine prescription with its two facets, command and prohibition. He the most High said to Iblis (Satan), 'Prostrate to Adam', and command manifested. He the most High said to Adam and Eve, 'Do not go near this tree', and prohibition manifested. Ibn 'Arabi makes a connection between the prescriptions by Allāh (ﷻ) for man and his reality. He sees that the prescription that Allāh (ﷻ) has specified for Adam (ﷺ) and Eve (ﷺ) is not a practical prescription because it contains a command of Not Being: 'do not do'. It is of the reality of man, the possible existent, that he does not act. It is as if it has been said to him, 'Do not depart from your origin.' However, the prescription to Satan contained a command of Being: 'do'. It is as if he was told to depart from his origin. The 'command' is harder on the soul than the 'prohibition' because it is an obligation to depart from the origin.

From the beginning of Divine prescription, according to Ibn 'Arabi, prohibition, in what it has of refraining from action, is in harmony with the reality of man, as it is established in non-existence and in not having smelt the breath of existence. It is as if man, when he refrains from action, returns to his reality, in which he becomes realized, and becomes conscious of it. And whoever is conscious of his reality without a doubt

traversed the valleys of contradictions, and he becomes safe from lapses, turning back and change, however circumstances and states may alter.

Therefore, human action, transformed through Divine command, is one of the ways to gain the *walâya* of Allāh (ﷻ). This is one manner in which one becomes available for the Divine selection described earlier. That is, that Allāh (ﷻ) selects some from every kind, looks at the actors, each according to the arena of his action, and selects from each type those whom He takes charge of through the quality of their action.

Ibn 'Arabi emphasizes the role of action and gain, taking into account the causality of causes, and goes beyond causes to the will of the Real, which favours one actor over another. So the desirer becomes desired by the Divine selection, the sought becomes the seeker and so on. There is human exertion and Divine selection, causality and no causality at the same time.

In conclusion, these friends of Allāh (ﷻ) who have arrived through actions are the carriers of the Divine prescriptive command and the guardians of its execution. There is no time on earth devoid of people whom Allāh chooses to be His friends. Each executes a Divine command directed towards the people, because no command issuing from the Real remains without effect. The men of rank are the friends who carry out the prescriptive command.

2. The Way of Witnessing: Refraining from Action

We now arrive at the creativity of Ibn 'Arabi and the specificity of his experience. Everything he has said up to now is characterized by universality, breadth of

One cannot assume the character traits of Allāh except through Allāh (ﷻ), so which character traits do you assume in abstinence?

As for wakefulness and refraining from it, the station of wakefulness is called the station of self-subsistence and that wakefulness is one of the four supports upon which the dwelling of the substitutes (*abdāl*) is based: wakefulness, hunger, silence and solitude. The ultimate one stationed in this station is the Pole of the time (who is 'awake to preserve the creation') and in spite of the height of the station of wakefulness, Ibn 'Arabi makes sleep higher than it. He says that sleep is a state which transports the servant from witnessing in the world of the senses to witnessing in the in-between world (*barzakh*) that is the presence of meanings. This is a more perfect world because it is the origin of the world; it has real existence and rules in all matters.

So through these three simple examples it is clearly shown that the reason for refraining from action, according to the Great Shaykh, is the occurrence of unveiling and specific witnessing. The actor acts, until he is surprised by an unveiling or witnessing that changes the course of his life and transports him from doing and exertion to refraining from doing: 'the contemplation of Allāh (ﷻ) in his creation'. His view of the creation changes, a change that he cannot prevent or formulate rationally to others. The servant, according to the Shaykh, 'cannot repulse the revelation from himself if it is a reality, for he is ruled by it', and as he says in another passage, if 'they receive the unveiling they are unable to ignore what they know'.

enters the whole in its integrated harmony, where every reality forms a part carrying the whole.

How does Ibn 'Arabi justify this path, built on refraining from action, logically and according to religious law? How does he justify man going outside the Divine command that he considered the entry to the *walâya* in the last section? If the repentant one is a *walî*, how can the one who refrains from repentance be a *walî*, and so on in every station?

We start with a simple text that shows the divergence of the path, according to Ibn 'Arabi, into two, the second of which is higher than the first. He says about seclusion that its origin in law is from the holy Hadith: 'He who remembers Me in himself, I remember him in Myself', which is the highest station. He then goes on to contradict this by saying that seclusion is only appropriate for the veiled one. For the people of unveiling, seclusion is never appropriate because they witness the high spirits and the spirits of fire, and see the creation being eloquent.

Unveiling forbids seclusion because the servant, when he is unveiled, knows that he is not in seclusion. The Divine Names the First and the Hidden request seclusion, while the Last and the Manifest request refraining from seclusion, because the Real is the Manifest in the essences of the world and there is no other than He.

He says about abstinence that it is one of the stations that accompanies the servant as long as there has been no unveiling. If the veil is lifted from the essence of his heart, he stops abstaining and must not abstain. According to what he says, if you see the Real you do not abstain because Allāh does not abstain in creation.

of the Real and a mirror. Everything becomes equal to him and the Real appears in everything, both in action and refraining from action. Only this unveiling can transport the seeker from the path of conduct to the path of witnessing, from action to refraining from action. We have to say that this unveiling is a condition for this transportation.

This is how we enter into the unity of existence, according to Ibn 'Arabi, into the Divine Names which require the creature to be attached to them so that they can manifest their sovereignty in him. We stay with the Divine Names, where the person has pity on himself because of the appearance of their sovereignty in him, which is inevitable so that the Divine predications do not cease. Ibn 'Arabi recounts that a friend of his met one of the Substitutes (*abdâl*) and complained to him about the state of people and their wickedness. The Substitute became angry and said to him, 'Do not interfere between the master and his servant. Do you want the Divinity to cease its sovereignty?' "If all creatures desired the manifestation of the effects of the names of Mercy and Beneficence in them, on whom will fall the revelation of the names of Taking and Anger and Revenge? Is the unveiling of the *walî* a recurrence of the knowledge that was given during the time when Adam (ﷺ) was made vicegerent and when the Real taught him all the Names?

In summary: these friends of Allāh (ﷺ) who have arrived through the way of unveiling are in a manner of speaking the carriers of the Divine creative command, the carriers of the effects of the Divine Names that require manifestation in creation. There is

no time on earth devoid of people who each carry the effect of a Divine Name (the servant of the Gracious, the servant of the Forgiver, the servant of the Avenger), such that no Name remains without authority.

Conclusion

We reach the conclusion, from re-reading Ibn 'Arabi's *Futûhât*, that there are two paths for the *walâya*: the path of action and the path of witnessing. The end of both is almost the same. According to Ibn 'Arabi the path of action leads the seeker to unification (*tawhîd*) and the path of witnessing begins with unification. Ibn 'Arabi indicates this in what he promises the seeker after following the nine actions in the interior and the exterior, and before meeting with the right teacher. He says, 'He has to adhere to the nine things and if he works on these things he will have a firm footing in unification.'



wa Allahu A'lam

